

Approved For Release 2000/04/14 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000200

Helms' Letter On Fulbright Stirs Senate Furore

Director of CIA Sends
Note Praising Newspaper
for Attacking Arkansan

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WASHINGTON — The Senate erupted in shock and anger Thursday with the disclosure that Richard Helms, the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency, had praised a newspaper attack on Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.).

Several senators expressed disbelief at Helms' action. Another said Helms owed an apology to every senator for writing a letter to the editor of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat expressing "pleasure" in reading an editorial which described Fulbright as "the crafty Arkansan."

Helms promptly apologized to Fulbright. As a high official of the executive branch of government approving public criticism of a senator, he had been caught in what both friends and critics of the CIA regarded as an impolitic and indefensible position.

Helms to Be Witness

Fulbright arranged Thursday to have Helms appear this morning before the Foreign Relations Committee, which the Arkansan heads.

The Globe-Democrat editorial July 18 was entitled "Brickbats for Fulbright."

The editorial congratulated the Senate for action July 14 in sidetracking a move led by Fulbright to broaden Senate scrutiny over the CIA. The editorial described Fulbright as "the crafty Arkansan" who had been "properly rebuked."

The editorial, asserting that Fulbright had been given his "come-uppance," said in part:

"The crafty Arkansan had sought to take away some of the jurisdiction of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations committees, whose ranking members have exclusive supervision of CIA."

DRAWS SENATE FIRE — Central Intelligence Director Richard Helms, whose letter applauding an editorial stirred criticism in the Senate.

UPL/Telephoto

Seen as a Rebuke

It added that Fulbright's proposal "should have been doomed from the start" and that the Senate not only had rebuked Fulbright but had given the CIA "a sound vote of confidence."

The Senate's attention was drawn to the Helms letter by Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D-Minn.), author of the ill-fated resolution that would have given Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee a share in the watchdog activities over the CIA.

McCarthy called Helms' letter, which was published in the Globe-Democrat Wednesday, "entirely out of order."

Other senators were quick to agree.

Helms, contacted Thursday evening, said he had called Fulbright as soon as he heard of the Senate discussion and apologized for the letter. "I made a mistake and I sincerely regret it," Helms said he had told Fulbright.

Disclosure of Helms' letter came one month to the day after the Senate unanimously confirmed him June 28 as the first career man to head the big, supersecret intelligence agency.

It also came exactly two weeks after the Senate by a 61 to 25, pigeon-

holed the move by Fulbright and McCarthy to broaden Senate supervision of CIA operations.

In his letter, which the Globe-Democrat printed under the heading of "CIA Head Pleased," Helms told the newspaper:

"I want to let you know of my pleasure in reading the editorial 'Brickbats for Fulbright' in the Globe-Democrat of July 18.

"It reflects so well your paper's policy of 'printing the news impartially, supporting what it believes to be right and opposing what it believes to be wrong without regard to party politics'."

Sen. Saltonstall said Helms "assured me that it is the only time he has written such a letter."

Fulbright, stepping into the verbal storm, called it the "first letter of this kind I've heard written by the director of the CIA."

View Questioned

He questioned whether Helms had "misconstrued" the Senate's action two weeks ago as a "vote of confidence" to involve himself in domestic matters.

Fulbright said one of the things he wanted his committee to have a chance to examine was whether the CIA "takes part in domestic affairs." As an example, he cited what he called reports that "this agency takes part in the election of unions."

Fulbright did not amplify and said he never before had been willing even to mention such reports publicly.

Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) called the Helms letter "a most serious matter."

"I'm more than a little surprised that the director of the silent service has seen fit to write such a letter," Mansfield said. He added that he hoped the Senate's angry reaction would be brought to the attention of Mr. Helms.

It was.

CIA Operations

A Foreign Relations Committee spokesman said Helms probably would be

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